UNITED NATIONS

EP

Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme

Distr.
GENERAL

UNEP/GC.18/26
24 March 1995

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Eighteenth session
Nairobi, 15-26 May 1995
Item 4(b) of the provisional agenda*

POLICY ISSUES: EMERGING POLICY ISSUES

Implications for the United Nations Environment Programme of major international events

Report by the Executive Director

Summary

The present report summarizes the conclusions of major international events since the seventeenth session of the Council and submits the follow-up strategies of UNEP for the Council's consideration. UNEP's substantive actions at the project level are embodied in the proposed programme of work: Fund programme activities for the biennium 1996-1997 (UNEP/GC.18/9 and Add.1).

Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Governing Council may wish to take note of the present report and to express its views on the UNEP strategies in the context of its deliberations on the proposed programme of work: Fund programme activities for the biennium 1996-1997.

A. Agenda for Peace

1. Upon the invitation of the summit meeting of the Security Council held in January 1992, the Secretary-General presented to the Security Council and to the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session a report entitled "An Agenda for Peace" (A/47/277-S/24111). The Assembly welcomed this report and adopted its resolution 47/120 A of 18 December 1992, "An Agenda for Peace: preventive diplomacy and related matters". Subsequently, in 1993, the General Assembly adopted two related resolutions, including 47/120 B of 20 September 1993, "An Agenda for Peace". In January 1995, the Secretary-General submitted a position paper entitled "Supplement to An Agenda for Peace" (A/50/60-S/1995/1). In this series of actions, four issues have been addressed, namely, (i) preventive diplomacy, (ii) peacemaking (iii) peace-keeping, and (iv) post-conflict peace-keeping (this last item was added in the Secretary-General's position paper of January 1995).

---

* UNEP/GC.18/1.

Na.95-0257 280395 290395

/...

2. UNEP's mandate does not extend to any of the four issues addressed in "An Agenda for Peace". However, peace is a fundamental prerequisite for environmentally sound development. UNEP has a major role to play in preventing international conflicts due to the scarcity or depletion of environmental resources which are shared among countries, and in ensuring environmentally sound development in the aftermath of armed conflicts.

3. In the context of its mandate, UNEP is responsible for the preparation and dissemination of information regarding the state of the environment and emerging environmental policy issues. UNEP is also responsible for coordination and promotion of relevant scientific research, development of international environmental law, promotion of subregional and regional cooperation, and so forth. Actions in these areas facilitate the common understanding of environmental and natural resource issues which are shared among countries and which could become a cause of future potential conflicts. An outstanding example is UNEP's involvement in the field of management of internationally shared river basins and the development of non-juridical mechanisms for the avoidance and settlement of environmental disputes. Broadly speaking, development of international environmental agreements is also a form of preventive diplomacy. Further, through its Environment and Natural Resource Information Networks (ENRIN), UNEP is creating appropriate data management capabilities within a network of national and subregional institutions, so as to support subregional organizations mandated to undertake collaborative action on various environment and development issues.

4. UNEP has been and will continue to undertake its activities for environmentally sound development in post-conflict situations. UNEP will further enhance its preventive diplomacy approach, as well as its cooperation with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) in the activities of the Joint Task Force on the Continuum from Relief to Development, either through its advisory services to Governments or through its sectoral subprogramme activities.

B. Agenda for Development

5. In response to General Assembly resolution 47/181 of 22 December 1992, the Secretary-General circulated in May 1994 a report on an agenda for development (A/48/935). Subsequently, and building on the views expressed during the World Hearings on Development conducted by the President of the General Assembly in June 1994 and the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council held the same month, the Secretary-General submitted to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session a report entitled "An agenda for development: recommendations" (A/49/665) of the General Assembly. By paragraph 1 of its resolution 49/126 of 19 December 1994, the Assembly decided to establish an ad hoc open-ended working group of the General Assembly to elaborate further an action-oriented, comprehensive Agenda for Development, which should begin its work as early as possible in 1995.

6. In his reports, the Secretary-General identified five dimensions of development, namely, peace, the economy, environmental protection, social justice and democracy. Although an Agenda for Development has a strong focus on development assistance activities, the environment is termed as a basis for sustainability, and it is stated that the interconnections between the environment, society, the economy and political participation highlight the importance of addressing the environmental aspect of development in a national context (A/48/995, para. 84). The reports also cover many other issues of relevance to UNEP, including post-conflict development, protection of physical environment in economic development, investment in human development, environmental statistics and indicators for informed decision-making, and international cooperation within the framework of multilateral conventions.

7. In view of the broadness of the Agenda for Development initiative, and its significant relevance to environmental issues, UNEP's positive participation as a United Nations programme, and its coordinating and catalytic activities as a United Nations centre of environmental excellence, are of vital importance to making the Agenda operational.

C. Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States

8. The Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States adopted the Declaration of Barbados, and the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. The Programme of Action presents a basis for action in 14 agreed priority areas and defines a number of policies and actions related to environmental and development planning that should be undertaken by small island developing States with the cooperation and assistance of the international community. In its resolution 49/122 of 19 December 1994, the General Assembly endorsed the Declaration and the Programme of Action, and decided upon a number of modalities for the follow-up.

9. The 14 agreed priority areas are: (i) climate change and sea level rise; (ii) natural and environmental disasters; (iii) management of wastes; (iv) coastal and marine resources; (v) freshwater resources; (vi) land resources; (vii) energy resources; (viii) tourism resources; (ix) biodiversity resources; (x) national institutions and administrative capacity; (xi) regional institutions and technical cooperation; (xii) transport and communication; (xiii) science and technology; and (xiv) human resource development. Since UNEP has specific competence in most of these areas, its future contribution to international follow-up actions is incorporated in the current and future programming processes, in particular, within the programme element entitled "Caring for freshwater, coastal and marine resources".

D. International Conference on Population and Development

10. By its resolution 49/128 of 19 December 1994, the General Assembly endorsed the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo from 5 to 13 September 1994, and decided, inter alia, that the substantive sessions of the Economic and Social Council would consider the questions relevant to the follow-up to the Conference. Within the United Nations system, the Inter-Agency Working Group, chaired by the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), has been established.

11. As far as UNEP is concerned, chapter III of the Programme, "Interrelationships between population, sustained economic growth and sustainable development", and its section C, "Population and the environment", in particular, require its substantive contribution. Important issues raised include: (i) the need to integrate population issues in development policy formulation, capacity-building for policy formulation and implementation, education and awareness promotion, and public participation; (ii) environmentally sound consumption pattern and trade practices; and (iii) empowerment of women.

12. Furthermore, chapter XII, on technology, research and development, contains several areas where UNEP has comparative strength, including:

(a) Scientific analysis of the population-environment nexus;

(b) Analysis, dissemination and use of population-environment information. The use of geographical information systems (GIS) is highly relevant in this context;

(c) Information networking, an area in which INFOTERRA will have a role.

E. United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

13. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 entered into force on 16 November 1994. Of its 320 articles, articles 192-237 deal with the general subject of protection and preservation of the marine

environment. In addition, many other articles deal with environmental questions in specific areas, namely, article 43, on pollution in international straits, articles 61-68, on conservation and utilization of living resources in the exclusive economic zone, articles 116-120, on management and conservation of the living resources of the high seas, and article 145, on protection of the marine environment from activities in the seabed and ocean floor beyond the limits of national jurisdiction.

14. Now that the Convention has entered into force, its successful implementation depends heavily on the actions of the individual parties. Many articles require legal and administrative action by parties: for instance, the conservation of marine environment within national jurisdiction is the responsibility of coastal States. Thus, the parties will be faced with a broad range of responsibilities for environmental conservation, which encompass adoption of laws and regulations for the prevention and control of pollution, setting and implementation of environmental standards, and taking legal actions in the case of breaches of relevant national as well as international legal requirements.

15. UNEP has a variety of programme activities of relevance to the effective implementation of the Convention. In particular, through the regional seas programme, which now involves over 140 countries and territories, UNEP has been carrying out, in collaboration with those countries, environmental monitoring and assessment and the promotion of environmentally sound coastal area management. UNEP is playing a leading role in the international deliberations on control of marine pollution caused by land-based sources. In March 1995, UNEP organized a meeting of Government-designated experts in Reykjavik, which reviewed and revised the draft Global Programme of Action to Protect the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities. In November 1995, an intergovernmental conference will be held in Washington, D.C., to adopt the Programme, for which UNEP has offered to provide the secretariat functions. Through its integrated programme covering freshwater and marine water bodies, UNEP's contribution to the effective implementation of the Convention will be further enhanced.

F. World Summit for Social Development

16. The World Summit for Social Development was held in Copenhagen from 6 to 12 March 1995, with the participation of nearly 120 Heads of State and Government. The Summit addressed four main issues, namely: (i) the enabling environment for social development; (ii) eradication of poverty; (iii) the expansion of productive employment and the reduction of unemployment; and (iv) social integration. It adopted the Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action.

17. The Programme of Action contains concrete recommendations on each of the four main issues. It recalls and recommends sustainable development in an enabling political and legal environment. In its chapter V, "Implementation and follow-up", it contains clear recommendations regarding: (i) national strategies; (ii) involvement of civil society; (iii) mobilization of financial resources; and (iv) the role of the United Nations system. One noteworthy recommendation in this chapter is that the Economic and Social Council consider the possibility of holding joint meetings with the Development Committee of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund on the issue of social development.

18. UNEP contributed to the Summit its new publication Poverty and the Environment, which stressed that poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability are not mutually exclusive goals but are prerequisites of each other. The Executive Director's statement at the Summit further stressed the importance of participation, investments in human capital, use of relevant policy tools for sustainable development and needs of enhanced international cooperation. Many of the recommendations are of direct relevance to UNEP activities in the context of development and use of policy tools and advisory services to Governments. The proposed programme of work: Fund programme activities for the biennium 1996-1997 provides for a potentially important contribution by UNEP to the world community's challenge in this respect.